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ADDRESS

OF

HON. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW,

AT THE LAYING OF

THE CORNER-STONE OF THE COLLEGE BUILDING

GIVEN BY WILLIAM H. VANDERBILT

TO THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS,

APRIL 24TH, 1886.



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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: The most instructive and pleasurable of our public assemblies are those which commemorate the better elements of our common humanity. The fierce competitions of our industrial conditions present the possibilities for unequal success and provoke the antagonisms which threaten social order and security.

As the less fortunate drift into hostility to their more successful brethren, and those who by their own ability or by inheritance have been lifted above the struggles of life lose sight of and sympathy with the workers, the internal relations of crowded communities become dangerous and intolerable. At this point the man of wealth who founds or endows an institution which shall contribute in a large and permanent way to the welfare of the people becomes a statesman as well as a philanthropist. He brings us back to first principles in this recognition of our common origin and interests. We discover that what he is all may become, and that at some time he

or his father began with no other capital than brains, character, and health. The currents of human sympathy again flow and throb between the avenue and the alley, the cottage and the palace. Each recognizes that not by revolution or anarchy, but by the ordinary mutations of fortune they may change places, and upon the prosperous is impressed the lesson of the responsibilities of their position, and upon the poor the opportunities which are open under our institutions to themselves or their children.

But how most wisely to invest the money which is to carry out a charitable purpose is not an easy problem. It is often partly wasted

to gratify the vanity of the donor. Mr. Vanderbilt had become familiar by his own sufferings, so patiently endured that none but his intimate friends knew of them, with the beneficent effects of medical skill and the possibilities of its growth. With his strong common sense he saw that here was practically an untried field where the advancement of science might work out the most beneficent and benevolent ends. Libraries, hospitals, and art and literary institutions existed in numbers, each doing in its own way admirable work. While in the Old World governments fostered schools of medicine, here their only patrons were the profession, and there was not a

single great endowment in the land. To build a college to be called by his name was a temptation, but in a city where so many excellent universities already existed, he saw that the wiser use of his money was to develop and enlarge an old institution, whose age, traditions, and experience were of incalculable value, and constituted a permanent capital which wealth could not create. In selecting the College of Physicians and Surgeons, he chose the oldest in age and the equal in rank and equipment of the best. The story of this school is the history of the progress of medicine in America for a hundred years.

Ninety-nine years ago a small

body of young physicians in this city formed a society with the title of this college, declaring that their purpose was "to counteract as far as possible the evil influences brought to bear upon the profession, to serve the poor, and to improve medical science." They established the first free dispensary New-York ever had, and within its walls gave gratuitous attendance on the poor, and lectures and instruction to students. Four years afterward, in 1791, they came with a full corps of professors and sixty-one students and a memorial unanimously indorsing them from the County Medical Society to the Regents of the University of the State of New-York, praying to be

taken under their "protection." The movement inspired immediate and universal interest. Old doctors bearing diplomas from Edinburgh, Paris, and Vienna hailed it as the dawn of a new and hopeful era in the progress of their profession in the Republic, and to the young it was full of brilliant promise. That grizzly and gallant warrior and patriot, Baron Steuben, who was a member of the Board of Regents, came down from the sterile farm which the State had voted him as a reward for his services in the Revolutionary War, to examine and report, and upon the recommendation of himself and his fellow-committeemen the Legislature on the 24th of March, 1791, author-

ized the Regents in their discretion to incorporate the College of Physicians and Surgeons, provided its capital did not exceed £60,000 and the Regents appointed its professors and conferred its degrees.

Thus successfully started, the young college began its prosperous and progressive, but adventurous and aggressive career. But its pathway was not clear. The Regents approved of this law and appointed a committee to prepare a charter for the young university. The Trustees of Columbia College protested against the granting of this charter on the ground that they were authorized to establish a Medical School, that they had the business much at heart and were pro-

ceeding as fast as possible, with the prospect and intention of effecting all the objects which the rival school could accomplish if permitted by the Regents under the Act of 1791. They successfully fought off affirmative action until the twelfth of March, 1807, when the coveted charter was secured. By this charter the Medical Society of the City of the County of New-York was incorporated as the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Dr. Nicholas Romaine, who had originated the first Medical School in 1787, petitioned for collegiate recognition by the State in 1791, and nobly kept the faith till the victory of 1807, became its first President. The contest which Columbia College and

her Medical Department began in 1792 was now taken up with renewed vigor by the Physicians and Surgeons assuming the offensive. They demanded that the College School should be merged with them, and Columbia recognize the Physicians and Surgeons as its Medical Department. The Regents and the Legislature became involved in this contest, and the marvelous patience and learning of Chancellor Kent were exhausted in an effort to settle it. But it continued until in 1814 that ancient and venerable seat of learning surrendered unconditionally and accepted your terms. The Regents expressed their profound satisfaction in this

result by reporting "that from the medical college thus united, and embracing the most eminent medical talent of the State in one splendid seminary, the most beneficial consequences may be anticipated." But the battle for sole supremacy was not yet over. A number of professors seceded and procured authority from Rutgers College, New Jersey, to open in this city a medical school and confer upon its graduates the Rutgers degree. The Legislature was appealed to, State pride was invoked; the question became one of the political issues of the time. The Physicians and Surgeons again triumphed, by the passage of a law declaring that degrees conferred upon

the sacred soil of New-York by the chartered colleges of foreign governments should be void; and this was one of the reasons put forth by New Jersey for the retaliatory legislation under which for half a century she exacted toll by way of State tax from our citizens crossing her borders. With the growth of the city this feeling gave way to a generous recognition of all worthy comers into this exhaustless field of education and usefulness.

The medical colleges of New-York are no longer enemies but friendly rivals, emulous in that strife for excellence by which each stimulates the others; and all combined form a splendid New-York University of

Medicine. Large endowments to any of them are of benefit to all, because none can be lifted to a position which the rest will not soon crowd in this most happy contest to discover and impart those things which will prolong life, heal the sick, restore the crippled and injured, and alleviate suffering. The history of this college furnishes an illustration of the moral progress of the century. In the good old times, the doctrine that the end justifies the means received frequent and most authoritative approval. The State in 1808, and again in 1814, resorted to that most insidious and demoralizing form of gambling, the lottery, to put money into its treasury for the

endowment and development of literary institutions and to promote higher education. From the first of these lotteries this college received \$5000, and from the second \$30,000, and without other public assistance, has struggled and expanded until after a lapse of seventy-two years it becomes one of the strongest and best-appointed schools in the world, through the medium of the splendid benefaction we this day commemorate. Upon these grounds, donated by William H. Vanderbilt, his gift erects, furnishes, and endows a building equal to all the requirements of the present and the needs of the future. Mr. William D. Sloane builds the Maternity Hos-

pital, and the generosity of his wife endows all the beds, making them free; while the four sons create the Clinic, which will be a vast dispensary, giving without charge to the poor, for all time, medicines and the best professional attendance, as a memorial to their father, more grateful to him if living and to his spirit now that he is dead than stately shaft or gorgeous mausoleum. [Applause.]

The advances made by practical medicine in the past hundred years have kept pace with the wonderful development of this century in every department of human thought and energy. The brilliant discoveries in chemistry have unfolded the mysterious processes of life and death. The

microscope has found the germs which spread disease, carry infection, and propagate pestilence, and science is experimenting for their control or extermination. Invention and observation have stimulated each other, until the functions, the operations, and the condition of every part of living men are seen by a diagnosis as clear and complete as the beaten pathway of truth, while pharmaceutical chemists have found new remedies and discovered the active principle of those known before, so that the revelation and location of diseases have been followed by the finding of the drugs by which they may be stayed or cured. To meet the requirements of this tremendous

and beneficent revolution medical education is no longer didactic, but clinical or experimental. Object teaching creates the modern physician. The lecturer of to-day is no longer a theorist, but a demonstrator of what the student can see. The laboratory, the hospital, and the dispensary are all necessary for his instruction. To extract the virtues from plants and minerals, to compound the elements which nature furnishes for cure, to walk the hospitals, to examine the endless forms of disease which flow through a dispensary, must be his daily life. To gather these in any institution has heretofore required a capital beyond other resources than those of the

Government, and hence the American physician has not felt fully equipped until he has received at London, Paris, and Vienna these practical lessons. Now a million of dollars, a private benefaction, renders possible the construction and equipment of a medical college superior to any ever known in this country and equal to the best in the world. With this endowment, and the impulse and inspiration which will follow it, New-York will become the center of medical learning, education and acquirement for the American Continent. [Applause.]

Great fortunes involve grave duties from which there is no escape. The administration of a vast estate is a

trust of far-reaching responsibilities. The law does not and can not say how he shall use it, but the jury of the world is day by day taking testimony, and every right-minded man wants its favorable verdict. He must not squander, or waste, or hoard, and so long as it is actively employed it does a public service. Strong and masterful men who create and hold together, and manage great enterprises which give employment and wages to thousands of people, and who keep their fortunes active in the conduct and development of business, are practical benefactors and philanthropists. They are of necessity the hardest workers in their system and often crushed by its weight. But they cannot stop at

the point where their roads or mills, mines or factories furnish the means of living to the healthy and able-bodied. They must contribute in liberal measure for the young, the helpless, the infirm, and the aged. In this they are laying up for themselves not only treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal, but the sweet incense of gratitude and praise ever wafted to their memories. Said John Howard, the philanthropist, when dying of disease contracted in the service of the unfortunate: "Let my monument be a sun-dial. I would be useful after my death."

William H. Vanderbilt led a life of work and care. He knew merit,

and recognized, rewarded and promoted it in numberless ways; and he despised idlers, pretenders, and shams. He wanted his fellow-men to look through the wealth he was administering to the best of his ability and see him as he understood himself, claiming no superiority to which he was not fairly entitled, trying to do his duty as a man and a citizen, living temperately, loving his friends, and willing to help in every good or public work. He was proud of New-York, and besides his conspicuous gifts for the Obelisk and this college, he contributed in an unobtrusive way vast sums for its religious, benevolent, art, and educational enterprises. This great city, with its marvelous growth,

its cosmopolitan character, and its limitless future, is the most interesting of social and political problems. The world in miniature lives and works and illustrates all civilizations within its walls, and the time is not distant when the pulsations of its thought and commerce will move the world. From this foundation will rise an institution which will give New-York the first rank in the most beneficent of the sciences. May it be also an example inspiring others to those deeds which are possible only to a few, but wisely bestowed may make our metropolis supreme in every department which educates, elevates and ennobles the race. [Applause.]



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